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ABSTRACT

The research on intercultural communication design illustrates that definitions of propaganda and agitation can be altered if there is a change from an open to a closed culture, or vice versa. Russia and East Germany serve as examples of closed cultures, and the United States is employed on a comparative basis as an open culture. To enhance open culture understanding of the terms propaganda and agitation, the research delineates their closed culture functions. A communication design of the concept of feedback in specific closed culture propaganda and agitation is presented to illustrate intercultural concepts and functions. The design also serves to exhibit the intercultural effect of lack of information, definition confusion, and misconceptions of function. The research stresses that if there is little or no analysis of divergent communication functions and awareness of cultural definition, intercultural understanding may be thwarted and research stymied. (Author/RB)

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INTERCULTURAL DEFINITION AND COMMUNICATION DESIGN: PROPAGANDA AND AGITATION

by

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ABSTRACT

Intercultural Definition and Communication

Design: Propaganda and Agitation

All too often we find that within a culture there is little agreement in defining certain communication terms. Yet, other cultures may have definitions with which we are totally unfamiliar. This research attempts to clarify the concepts propaganda and agitation in "closed" cultures -- Russia and East Germany. The United States is employed on a comparative basis as an "open" culture. For study of intercultural definition and communication design, the research reaffirms an important point: Cultural context and the norms imposed by that culture must be realized and accounted for in all intra- and intercultural communications research.

The research illustrates that definitions of propaganda and agitation can be altered if there is a change from an open to closed culture, or the opposite. An open culture viewpoint toward these terms will be quite divergent from one that has experienced a different "state" of propaganda and agitation. Cultural semantics place boundaries on these terms for no two systems can identify with each other's concepts unless the purposes of those concepts are understood.

To enhance open culture understanding of the terms propaganda and agitation, the research dileneates their closed culture functions. Research done in Berlin and West Germany by this writer - involving interviews and field surveys - is discussed as data which illustrates, from a historical perspective, some of the problems of intercultural interpretation within the propaganda arena.

A communication design of the concept of feedback in specific closed culture propaganda and agitation is presented to illustrate intercultural concepts and functions. The design also serves to exhibit the intercultural effect of lack of information, definition confusion, and misconceptions of function.

The research stresses that if there is little, or no analysis of divergent communication functions and awareness of cultural definition, intercultural understanding may be thwarted and research stymied.

Intercultural Definition and Communication
Design: Propaganda and Agitation

If meanings are in people, then they are, of necessity, culture-bound. All too often we find that even within a given culture there is little agreement on terminology. In post-World War II America, the term, propaganda, has connotations of disrepute. In the wake of Watts, the Chicago Seven trial, Angela Davis, and even the Pentagon Papers issue, the term, agitation, has also fallen into semantic chaos. This writing attempts to clarify the concepts of propaganda and agitation in "closed" cultures. The United States is employed as an "open" culture for comparison to the closed cultures of Russia and East Germany.

If one attempts to define propaganda from open culture sources, a pot pourri emerges. Consider the following:

> such persuasive efforts through speech as are intended to influence the attitudes, and subsequently, the actions of individuals on controversial matters affecting the body politic.[1]

> a device used to induce acceptance or rejection of a proposal without examining its merits.[2]

> 'what the other guy does to get people to accept ideas I don't agree with.'[3]

> a form of suasion that aims to secure belief and action without, or with very little, rational justification being presented.[4]

Similarly, an open culture definition of agitation tends to connote negativism. Lomas' The Agitator in American Society states it is:

> a persistent and uncompromising statement and restatement of grievances through all available communication channels, with the aim of creating public opinion favorable to a change in some condition.[5]

Obviously, there are even more divergent definitions than these for

propaganda and agitation, but what of closed culture definitions? The problem here lies in the fact that the terms have undergone redefinition in the post-World War II closed cultures. Mein Kampf postulated that propaganda "works on the general public from the standpoint of an idea and makes them ripe for the victory of this idea,"[6] and it does not need to rack its brains with regard to the importance of every individual attracted to it...."[7] In 1942 G. F. Aleksandrov (head of the Soviet Party's Administration of Propaganda and Agitation) defined agitation as the great moral-political unity of the Soviet people.[8]

The post-war years have seen the development of propaganda and agitation as political tools in closed cultures. Agitation has become "political activity aimed at the consciousness and the feelings of the broad masses, through dissemination of specific ideas and slogans."[9] It is "the means of education, mobilization and activation of the masses...an important instrument of the political class struggle."[10] Propaganda for this closed culture is, pure and simply, "the adoption and propagation of the principles and techniques of Marxism-Leninism...the propagation of the theory."[11]

If definitions from pre to post-war times in closed cultures have changed, has the same been true for the individual? And, does definition change for persons who have transferred from closed to open cultures? Some research suggests that definitions are altered to perceive the closed culture definition as detrimental, without being able to objectively assess open culture connotations. Klaus Fenzel, Berlin resident and former Brown Shirt, stated that, "before the war propaganda as a word had no meaning for me. Now I hear politicians and think of propaganda. The idea leaves me with

a bad taste."[12] Mr. H. Florie, also of Berlin, offered the following explanation of the closed to open culture transformation:

> As students of the gymnasium we were aware of the Ministry of Propaganda. It meant patriotism, duty. He [Hitler] had a machine to tell us things we didn't know for truth. When I think of what propaganda and agitation was (sic) then [1938] it must only be evil. The same means of then succeed in the East Zone today. I mean that it is positive if you can be able to investigate it, if you get the chance to see more than one side.[13]

How well Florie's statement is supported by Brown's statement in Techniques of Persuasion that "one can only speak of propaganda when alternative views exist, and it is therefore not propaganda to teach a belief which is universal at a given time or place."[14] It is quite obvious that Marxism-Leninism is the present universal doctrine of the closed cultures in question.

A study of pre and post-war attitudes toward propaganda and agitation by Weisenborn suggests that doctrines of the German pre-war closed culture were not universal.

> A major hinderance in examining a pre/post attitude from this environment is that the researcher works with a split culture. He not only discovers the pre/post for all of Germany, but also the post East-West division. The East would notice little change in the condition of universal dogma for its members have continually existed in a dictatorial society. Residents of the West have a reluctance to discuss their involvement in the pre environment for obvious reasons: The free society in which they now live condemns the 'old' universal dogmas.
>
> Thus it is that interviewed West German residents made the following representative statements: 'I was never a Nazi member but had to accept their ideas to save my family.' (male, Stuttgart) 'Yes, I did accept what was known to me as propaganda because it was a spiritual justification. Hitler made the Jews ashes and the British made the people of Dresden ashes. What would be the difference?' (female, Berlin) 'Many times I doubted what the Ministry of Propaganda put in its bulletins, but mostly after Stalingrad.

> Propaganda is fine to agree with when the armies win and its (sic) defeat made his [Geobbels] propaganda disbelief (male, Bremerhaven).[15]

One's definition of propaganda and agitation can be altered if there is change from closed to open culture, or the opposite. Similarly, there is a confusion which arises from lack of knowledge about a culture different from one's own. An American viewpoint of these terms will be extremely divergent from that of one who has experienced a different "state" of propaganda and agitation. Cultural semantics place boundaries on the definition of these terms for "no two systems can identify with each other's concepts unless the purposes of those concepts are understood."[16]

For an open culture to understand the concepts of propaganda and agitation in closed cultures, function should be delineated. That function for these closed cultures is simply that agitation works within the larger framework of propaganda. Agitation will fulfill a social, political, or socio-political role in these closed cultures.

Alex Inkeles states that the "agitator is a social link between the Party leaders and the mass of people."[17] A strictly political approach to the function of agitators is made by Josheph Berliner. In his conception they are those agents who work primarily in factories and are efficiency experts who lead what one might call pep rallies.[18] Berliner points out that occasionally an agitator will be assigned to an individual worker in a factory. Even in such an instance the function remains political in nature. The combination socio-political function is defined by Lindley Fraser as the duty to:

> explain to the ordinary citizen what is the current Party policy and to justify it by whatever arguments are most likely to be effective... They also perform an important function

> as social companions, insuring that the citizen enjoys Party activities and day to day living.[19]

It must be remembered that agitators are not merely propagandists. In developing a frame of reference for the communication design in which agitators function, several points must be made. First, "a propagandist presents many ideas to one or few persons, an agitator presents only one or a few ideas, but he presents them to a mass of people."[20] (It must be understood that the mass need not be a single body, it may be a mass contacted individually.) Closed culture agitation is the means for political education of the masses of the broad working class. Finally, the agitator in theoretical terms is not an individual functionary. Within the Communist Party of the closed cultures (CPSU) an individual agitator is a functionary of the mass media. He is a station within a network of stations. The propaganda-agitation hierarchy is: 1) Propaganda is the dissemination of doctrines to the masses. 2) Propagandists are the persons who disseminate these doctrines. 3) Propagandists rely on mental stimulation within the masses. 4) Agitators are but one type of propagandist.[21]

For the individual agitator in the closed cultures, function is not extremely divergent. In Russia,

> the group agitator comes from the rank and file, shoulder to shoulder with the other workers, just like himself. And if he does not possess political and moral authority he will not stand above the average man, and the workers will not believe in him; and for success in agitation it is necessary that there be great faith in the agitator on the part of the masses.[22]

And, in East Germany:

> If the agitator wants to inspire the people, then he himself must be inspired, he must radiate human warmth, he cannot ignore open

> questions and the doubts of the people, he must assure himself whether his language and the terms expressed can be understood by the people, otherwise he may speak above the heads of the people and transform his agitation and propaganda for the people into 'empty patter.'[23]

A model of this functionary role may clarify closed culture propaganda and agitation.

By implementing a re-working of the Westly-MacLean communication model[24] it is possible to visualize closed culture propaganda and agitation. (Figure 1) The CPSU formulates ideologies; many of these pertain to Party doctrine and are channelled to the Agi-Prop division (the Party's propaganda division). In turn, these "x's" (items, events) are transferred to local secretariates and then given to agitators for dissemination to the masses.

The transferral of the "x's" from the point of origin to the masses can progress through several of the mass media. From the CPSU to agi-Prop it is always and only print; from Agi-Prop to A (local secretariate) it is accomplished with print, radio, television, and film. The transfer from A to C (agitators) is usually done with press, print, and film; the final transfer from C to B (the masses) is most often accomplished with print, and in the case of groups, film may be utilized. The content progresses along a continuum from prescription to description. These concepts are presented in Figure 2.

Of interest to communication research is the divergence the re-working of the Westly-MacLean model produces regarding the concept of feedback. Normally, it would be quite possible to have the following channels for feedback: f_{BC}, f_{CA}, and f_{BA}. Study of Figure 2 makes it apparent that these are not the channels available to closed culture propaganda and agitation feedback. Channel f_{BC} is constant, but the similarity ends at that point.

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Figure 1

The Westley-MacLean Model Illustrating Potential Closed Culture Feedback: Propaganda & Agitation

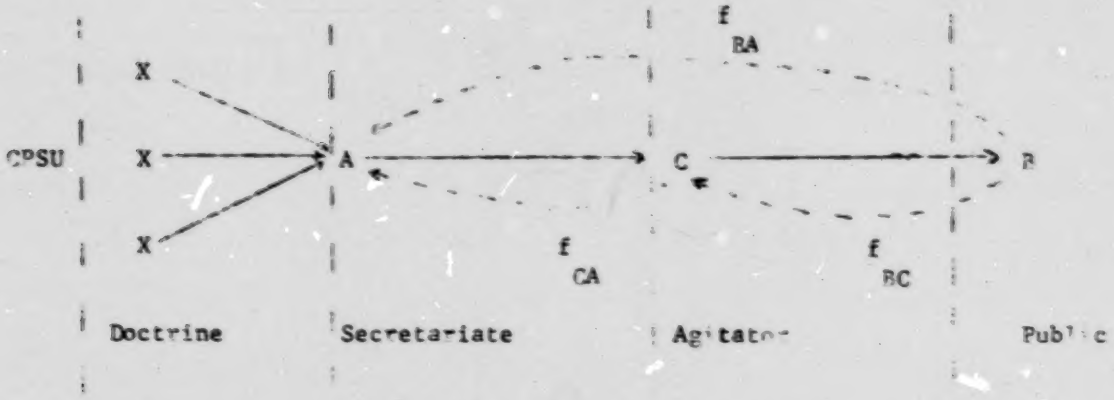
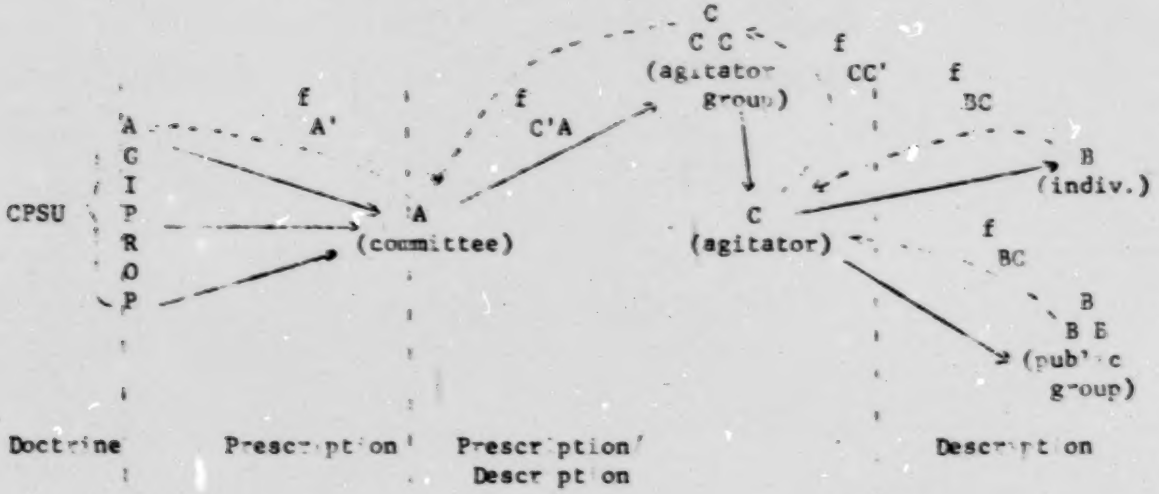


Figure 2

The Westley-MacLean Model Illustrating Actual Closed Culture Feedback: Propaganda & Agitation



Rather, feedback is forced through an indirect channel while ascending the structural hierarchy -- from C it must go to an agitator meeting ($^{f}CC'$) and then to A ($^{f}C'A$). This minor alteration has major implications: It is the responsibility of agitator groups to filter information coming from the public prior to sending it up the communication/organizational hierarchy.

In studying communication design, this brief description of a design from a different culture reaffirms a desperately important point. Cultural context, and the norms imposed by that context must be realized and accounted for in all intra and intercultural communication studies. In the areas cited in this research, for example, standard connotations as well as denotations should be disregarded when one initiates any intercultural research. An American viewing a person's ability to make his opinion known in Russia or East Germany might look at the feedback channels represented by Figure 2 and assess that there are none. Conversely, the Russian or East German might presume that the American does not have access to the means of expression.

The cultural effect of lack of information and misdefinition is exhibited in the following response to a question in the Weisenborn study.

> Many of the American people have been told that Hitler told the German people a 'grosse Luge' (big lie) to achieve his power. Do you think this is an accurate statement? The overwhelming response to this question was, 'What big lie are you speaking of?'[25]

Perhaps it is the American who has been propagandized to believe that all the German people were duped by Hitler. In order to avoid a problem similar to the one open and closed culture members might have when discussing the need for freedom of speech or press, one must analyze and understand the nature of the two systems. If there is no analysis of divergent communication functions and awareness of cultural definition message sent cannot equal message received.

Footnotes

[1]Lester Thonssen and A. Craig Baird, Speech Criticism (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1948), p. 281.
[2]Elton Abernathy, A Manual of Persuasion (New York: David McKay, Inc., 1964), p. 165.
[3]James McCroskey, An Introduction to Rhetorical Communication (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc.), p. 266.
[4]Wayne C. Minnick, The Art of Persuasion (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company 1957), p. 5.
[5]Charles W. Lomas, The Agitator in American Society (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.; Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968), p. 6.
[6]Adolph Hitler, Mein Kampf, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1943), p. 582
[7]Ibid., p. 581.
[8]G. F. Aleksandrov, in Alex Inkeles, Public Opinion in Soviet Russia (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1950), p. 68.
[9]Manfred Rexin, Agitation and Force as Instruments of Rule (Berlin: Office for All-Berlin Affairs, 1967), p. 2.
[10]Ibid.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Klaus Fenzel, interviewed by R. Weisenborn (Berlin: February, 1969).

[13]H. Florie, Ibid.

[14]J. A. C. Brown, Techniques of Persuasion (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 13.
[15]Ray E. Weisenborn, "Propaganda Reflections: Germany, 1935-1945" (Heidelberg: University of Maryland European Division, 1970), p. 14.
[16]Ibid., p. 2.

[17]Lindly Fraser, Propaganda (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 128.

[18]Josheph Berliner, Factory and Management in the USSR (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1957), p. 116.

[19]Fraser, loc. cit.

[20]Ibid.

[21]Alex Inkeles, Public Opinion in Soviet Russia (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), p. 39.
[22]Ibid., p. 88.

[23]Rexin, p. 6.

[24]Bruce H. Westley and Malcolm S. MacLean, Jr., "A Conceptual Model for Communications Research," Audio-Visual Communications Review, 3:3-12 (Winter 1955).
[25]Weisenborn, p. 17.